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Your Teenager and Your Family

The teenage years can be tough. So take time to talk to your teenager. And more importantly, listen.

Being a teenager with hearing loss can be very lonely.

Growing up with a hearing family can be hard for a teenager, even at home. Your teenager may miss out on jokes and family stories.

When you feel closest to your family, your teen may feel the most left out. Dinnertime and the holidays may be stressful for your teenager. Why?

- People are talking very fast.
- Not everyone may sign.
Or not everyone takes the time to face your child and speak clearly.
- If 1 person "interprets," that person may not be able to keep up.
- People change what they're talking about very quickly.

All this could make your teenager feel lonely or bored. Or maybe even a little depressed.

Spend 1-on-1 time with your child

There are many times you must find the time and go get pancakes on a Saturday morning alone, 1 parent and 1 child. Spend time with your teenager, just the 2 of you. Your teenager needs ALL of your attention to have a deep conversation.

Listen to your teenager

When we feel we have the most to say, that's when we should listen. Listen to your teenager. Try to remember how you felt when you were his age.

And see what way your teenager feels most comfortable communicating. Use that language because that's what your teenager understands best.

Show your teenager you love him - just the way he is.

Show your teenager you love as he is. Try not to act like you would love him more if he heard more, or had more hearing friends.

“ I felt like being just like my hearing siblings and friends was the bar I needed to reach. And when I couldn't, I felt like my parents were so disappointed in me.”

— A high school student

Don't be scared if your teenager is upset about being different. He or she **IS** different. And the truth is, this difference will make some extra challenges in life. But once you accept your child's feelings, you can start to work on the challenges.

Try some of these ideas to show that you love your child as he is:

- Turn on the captions on your TV so your teenager can enjoy TV shows with your family.
- Check your local theater to see when they show captioned movies.
- Check out plays by deaf groups, like the [National Theater of the Deaf](http://www.ntd.org/) (<http://www.ntd.org/>).
- Meet other deaf teenagers or adults. They could also be role models for your child.
- Get in touch with deafness organizations, like the [National Association of the Deaf](http://www.nad.org/) (<http://www.nad.org/>).
- Learn what [your child's legal rights](http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/help/rights/) are (<http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/help/rights/>). Help him feel comfortable standing up for his rights.
- At family get-togethers, let your child bring a friend or his pager. That way he'll have something to do while everyone is talking away.

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You can find this page online at:

<http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/growingup/teen/family.jsp>